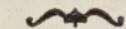


# RED HEELS

*By* LEXIE DEAN ROBERTSON



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WILD GINGER



**RED HEELS**



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# RED HEELS

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BY

LEXIE DEAN ROBERTSON



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DALLAS :: - :: TEXAS

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To

THREE WHO HAVE MADE LOVELY THE PATHS  
RED HEELS MUST FOLLOW:

MOTHER, DAD, AND JACK.



I am indebted to the following periodicals for permission to reprint poems which have first appeared in their pages: *The Dallas News*, *The Southwest Review*, *The Buccaneer*, *The Triangle*, *The Missionary Voice*, *Holland's*, *Good Housekeeping*, *The Ladies' Home Journal*, *The Houston Post-Dispatch*, *The Northwestern Miller*, *The Christian Herald*, *The Sunday School Magazine*, *Country Gentleman*, *Poetry and the Play*—an English Magazine, *Palo Verde*, *The Federation News*, *The Torch Bearer*, *JAPM*: *The Poetry Weekly*, the *Yearbook of the Poetry Society of Texas*, *The New York World*, and others.



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I

BUT NOW  
MY HEART  
GOES  
WANDERING



## RED HEELS

### GYPSY HEART

I'D love to be a gypsy  
With brown feet bare,  
And dance like flame  
Through night-black woods  
With starshine in my hair.

But a little house needs tending:  
Fires must be kept,  
White beds each morning  
Must be made,  
And porches newly swept.

And so I hush my wayward heart,  
And cook and serve the meals,  
But neighbors wonder  
Why I wear  
Gay slippers with red heels!

GARDEN TIME

I PLANTED three small dreams today  
In a corner of my heart;  
Two rosy ones where shadows play,  
And a wee white one apart.

I set them in a sunny place  
Where little cool thoughts blow,  
And left them such a lot of space  
They cannot help but grow!

## RED HEELS

### DESTINATIONS

THE dark highway is lighted  
With a thousand gleaming cars,  
Yet I shall make my journeyings  
Where there are only stars.

The highway ends at city gates  
Where all the world goes through,  
But my road seeks a quiet hearth  
Where there is only you.

## RED HEELS

### INHERITANCE

WHY does the smell of autumn rain  
When fringed grey clouds trail past a cobalt sky  
Strike at my heart a dim-remembered pain,  
Renascent of some Neolithic sigh?

## RED HEELS

### I SENT MY TRUE LOVE

I SENT my true love on his way  
Without one backward look,  
But now my heart goes wandering  
Along the road he took,

And I remember little things  
I had not known before—  
A smile as quick as lifted wings,  
The gay silk scarf he wore.

Such simple things to haunt me so  
Through mists of lonely tears,  
Yet I shall seek for them I know  
Through long and empty years.

## RED HEELS

### I GAVE MY LOVE

I GAVE my love to a wastrel  
With bonny autumn eyes,  
He spent his days in foolish ways,  
But, oh, his heart was wise.

He flung my love to the wanton winds,  
And broke my heart in twain,  
But, oh, would he come asking  
I'd give it him again.

## RED HEELS

### IF A GYPSY LAD SHOULD CALL

O H, there are days when I would go  
Wherever you might call.  
I would shut fast my cottage door  
And scale the garden wall,  
And where your slim brown hand led on  
By some dim forest track,  
I would trudge gaily at your side  
And never once look back.

And when the way had grown too long  
Your love would be my staff,  
Until we reached a lovely spot  
Where hidden waters laugh,  
While a low moon dusts sifted gold  
Through flaming autumn leaves,  
And dusky boughs are draped with lace  
An old grey spider weaves.

There you would chant your lyric tunes  
For the stars and me to hear,  
Till all the shadows faded out,  
Then you would draw me near,  
And I would sleep against your heart  
Until the opal skies  
Had dawned again to bring anew  
The wonder of your eyes.

## RED HEELS

Ah, there are days when I would fly  
To go where you might be. . . .  
But when my cottage lamps are lit,  
And tables set for tea,  
With fireshine dancing on the hearth  
And through the shadowed hall,  
I think I am a little glad  
Because you did *not* call!

## RED HEELS

### I HAVE HEARD WHIPPOORWILLS

YOU say that I have grown so strange  
Since I am home to stay?  
I have known shyer hearts to change  
When they were far away.

The night was sweet in Kelser Park:  
A yellow moon lay spilled,  
And whippoorwills sang after dark  
In air that honey filled.  
I felt the beauty all around  
Nor knew how it could be,  
I laid my face against the ground  
With no one there to see  
Except an understanding heart  
Who shared the night with me.  
Life offered me a brimming cup  
But I dared only taste.  
That brew was far too strangely sweet,  
I gave it back in haste.  
It bruised my soul to give it back  
And say I would not drink.  
I know how breaking on the rack  
Can make a drooling maniac  
For I felt ancient tortures sink  
Through me with every clanking link  
That chained me back to sober day  
Where sedate worlds move on their way.

## RED HEELS

I did not want to think or feel,  
I longed to dance some giddy reel  
With all the little shaking leaves  
That shimmered in the scented air,  
To catch the spilled moon in my hair,  
To wear the lace the spider weaves.

I longed to sit upon a star  
And laugh aloud to see  
How foolish righteous people are  
In awe of mystery.  
To be a fragment of the note  
That tumbled from the dark bird's throat  
And strike to every lover's ear  
The shivery green pain of fear,  
For love is brief and time is long  
To listen to a sad bird's song.  
I longed to lie in the lush grass  
And lure the wanton winds to pass  
Along the cool white length of me  
As if I were a crystal tree;  
To slide down from the shining moon  
On some smooth plane of sky  
And lose me in a rose-drunk swoon  
Where purple beetles fly;  
To know for mine each old delight  
That June holds hidden in her night.  
(I was a little mad, I think,  
When I refused that subtle drink.)

And all the while a whippoorwill  
Called from a dusky tree,  
Whose every aching silvered note  
Was echoed deep in me.

## RED HEELS

But I have come back home again  
To keep my little house,  
And live the mincing nibbled years  
As grey as any mouse.  
Yet though my ways seem just the same,  
My heart has known the heat of flame,  
And I am like a wind-tossed spark  
Since I have heard the whippoorwills  
That sing in Kelser Park.

EXPERIENCE

To write, I first must live, they said,  
    Know life and love and truth.  
And so I gaily ventured forth  
To seek life with my youth.

I met Love on the broad highway  
And teaching me to live,  
He took my heart and sipped my lips  
And left me naught to give.

And then Life caught and crushed me,  
And left me spent and white.  
Now only Truth is left . . . but that  
I cannot bear to write.

## RED HEELS

### ATAVISTIC

AUTUMN late and a blue mist blowing  
Beneath a sky chiffoned in ashy grey;  
A falling feather points the wild birds' going,  
And lures this migrant heart of mine away.

## RED HEELS

### EVANESCENCE

THE beauty that I long to stay  
Is caught in passing things:  
In fragile sound of far-off bells,  
In irised wings,

In little winds that puff white clouds,  
And in the sea's last blue,  
And in the heart of driftwood flames,  
. . . And in my love for you!

## RED HEELS

### DELIVERANCE

YOU took my little dreams  
That I kept hid behind locked bars,  
And led them out beneath the cool night sky,  
And showed them stars.

MEMORABILIA

FIVE things glimpsed unexpectedly  
Have filled my heart with singing gladness:  
A sudden hillside lake of Texas bluebonnets;  
A winding forest roadway in the golden haze  
Of an autumnal sunset;  
An ice-sheeted apple orchard,  
Dazzling under a brilliant moon;  
A slanting line of nile-washed turquoise sky  
After an April shower;  
And your love-awakened eyes.

## RED HEELS

### ILLUMINANTS

*(for J. whose hair is red)*

I LOVE bright things like candlelights  
Upon a window ledge,  
And beds of scarlet tulips  
Aflame beneath a hedge,  
A gypsy campfire glowing,  
The yellow harvest moon,  
And fireflies in a dusky gloam  
When night has come too soon,  
A maple tree that's all ablaze,  
Ships' lanterns far at sea,  
A burning star that leaves the sky  
A trail of fire for me.

But if all these were offered me,  
I know I'd choose instead—  
To light my heart through darksome days—  
A single shining head.

## RED HEELS

### MY SINS AND I

I TOOK my little secret sins  
Down to the creek to drown,  
Five cunning ones of black and white  
And two of shining brown.

I set them down in one long row  
And bade them meditate  
Upon their foolish wicked ways  
That led them to this fate.

They looked at me so wistfully  
And promised to be good,  
I yielded to their pleading eyes  
And hid them in the wood.

But when I had reached home again,  
There perched upon my sill  
Were all those naughty sins of mine,  
And they are with me still!

## RED HEELS

### TO BALLYQUIN FOR DREAMS

(*for M. S.*)

**A**ND I shall go to Ballyquin  
Where roses and pink fuchsias blow,  
And pungent peat smoke drifts in thin  
Blue clouds where low grey chimneys glow.

At Ballyquin near Kerry hills,  
With dusk tranquillity flows in,  
And scented purple mist distils  
The sweetness that is Ballyquin.

There tired hearts grow strong and brave,  
And tarnished faiths shine new again;  
There hungry souls find peace they crave  
Beneath thatched roofs in Ballyquin.

Yes, I shall go to Ballyquin  
Though I touch not that Irish shore,  
I'll find a refuge there within  
My secret dreams forevermore.

## RED HEELS

### SERENADE

THERE is a singing in my heart  
Like whispering of waves  
That echo tunes where mermaids sing  
Deep in their turquoise caves.

A singing like far temple bells  
Swung in a golden arc  
To build a bridge of melody  
From saffron dusk to dark.

Like shining splash of purple oars  
In some smooth moon-drenched pool  
Where willows dip their scented fronds,  
And little winds blow cool.

A singing sweet as any sound  
That beauty ever heard,  
And this is strange . . . because your name  
Is my song's only word.

## RED HEELS

TO YOU WHOM I SAW ONCE

*M.F.C.*

I REMEMBER

that your eyes were tranquil  
with the shining loveliness  
of some dark pool  
that holds the mirrored radiance of stars.

I remember

that your smile  
was like an unexpected glimpse  
of lifted wings—as when a cardinal  
flies home against the dusk.

I remember

that I might have hid my face  
against your heart,  
confessing all my fears  
and secret dreams.

## RED HEELS

### A ROMANY LAD PASSED BY

#### 1.

I KNOW a gypsy boy  
With dreams in his eyes,  
And tears in his laughter,  
For life's made him wise.

He carries quaint charms  
In his pack to sell,  
Good for the casting  
Of any dark spell.

One is for harvests,  
And one is for gold,  
And one is for warm hearths  
When you are old.

I bought a charm once  
With no coin to pay,  
But I've been a daft girl  
Since that day.

#### 2.

Once was a brown boy  
Taught me to sing,  
Took of my kisses  
But gave me no ring.

## RED HEELS

My song was a gay lilt,  
Silver as the moon,  
But now I can only croak  
A harsh dark tune.

### 3.

There is a gypsy lad  
Who flings coins away.  
Gold, he says, is heavy  
To carry at play.

I was his partner once  
To dance and to sing,  
But I stopped to gather up  
The coins he would fling.

Gold is a heavy load  
Just as he said,  
But now I must carry it  
Till I am dead.

GOSSIP

B EFORE I knew how cruel  
Just common talk can be,  
I thought that words were singing things  
With colors like the sea.

But since I've felt their caustic lash  
And know how they can sting,  
I hold my breath when words go by  
For fear they will not sing.

## RED HEELS

### HEARTCLEANING TIME

I TOOK my small dreams from my heart  
And laid them out to sun.

I found some worn quite shadow thin  
With colors streaked and run.

A few I thought I would not keep  
For they had grown so old,  
A drab cerise that had been pink,  
And one of tarnished gold.

A little bluing from the sky,  
White clouds to rinse them through,  
And after they had sunned all day  
I put them back like new.

## RED HEELS

### ROOF BOUND

YOU watch me primly sewing here,  
But you would never guess  
How far my vagrant heart has fled  
From this plain patterned dress.

You think this house holds all of me  
Within its painted walls,  
And never guess a part of me  
Runs where the high road calls.

You see my stitches deftly neat,  
Yet you may never know  
If some gay strolling lad should ask  
How very quick I'd go.

I'd lay my silver thimble down  
And run with singing feet  
Till I had come to that far place  
Where road and blue sky meet!

## HEART'S DESIRE

I KNOW that I shall run away  
Before the years go by  
To find a lonely kitchen  
And bake an apple pie.  
A blue and emerald morning,  
A mockingbird's clear trill,  
A kitchen with white curtains,  
And tulips on the sill!

There I shall pare red apples  
And sprinkle on each slice  
A snowy drift of sugar  
And a little whiff of spice.  
I'll dot the top with butter  
Dewy yellow from cool crocks,  
And the fragrant smell of baking  
Will outscent the four-o'clocks.

And folk who call me foolish  
Will pass and envy me,  
And stop and sniff about a bit,  
And ask themselves to tea!

## RED HEELS

### TO YOU

MY thoughts are little boats  
That sail about upon the sea of my dreams:  
Tug boats, straining and pulling,  
A loaded raft, a dory;  
All inextricably confused.  
Barges and scows,  
And sometimes a canoe in a clear space.  
Suddenly from the confusion emerges a beautiful skiff.  
Its sails are white and gleaming in the brightness.  
It skims across the waves with the grace of a sea gull.  
It is my thought of you.

**ABSENT**

I AM weary of being surrounded by things:  
Books in their neat rows,  
Magazines scattered about,  
Even my kitchen with its shelves of cheerful yellow bowls  
Does not stir me.  
I wander about my little house  
Like the wraith of a happy yesterday  
Hunting lost joys.  
I have no right to miss you so . . . in my little house.  
But once you sat with me before my fireside,  
And now the flames blaze at my heart,  
Mocking me with the emptiness of my house.

THE RODENT

DAY in and day out,  
What is there to do?  
Sit and hold my empty hands,  
Remembering you.

Memory is a hateful thing  
That gnaws like a mouse.  
I hear it nibbling . . . nibbling . . .  
All through the house.

If I turn through my music  
Or pick up a book,  
I find nibbled edges  
Everywhere I look.

## RED HEELS

### THE LOITERER

I TOOK a little wandering road  
That led me to the sky,  
And gathered up a treasure load  
As I was passing by.

The purple of a wild bird's wing,  
A white dawn-glistened hill,  
The silver tune that mad brooks sing,  
And gold the moon let spill.

Three new stars through a sycamore,  
A whiff of clover breeze,  
Pearl where a new wave kissed the shore:  
I could not choose from these.

I could not bear to leave just one,  
And that's the reason why  
I did not try to find the sun  
When I had reached the sky.

MY NEIGHBOR BUYS WHITE HYACINTHS

MY neighbor drives her car at dawn  
And leaves her bed unmade,  
Or reads till noon upon the lawn,  
Sprawled in the coolest shade.  
I never see her cook or sew,  
Nor dress to make a call—  
She's just as like as not to go  
Wrapped in a scarlet shawl  
With silver slippers on her feet  
And a red rose in her hair,  
Like that she'll dash out in the street  
And never seem to care.

Some said her kitchen was a sight:  
I went to borrow tea,  
But everything was quite all right  
So far as I could see.  
It's true, it was not plain and gray  
As most our kitchens are;  
But parrots painted on a tray,  
Blue asters in a jar,  
And window curtains hemmed in pink,  
With rag rugs on the floor,  
And a mirror hung above the sink,  
Are not so like to bore!

## RED HEELS

I've seen her when the clock struck one  
And she had lolled all day,  
Skip to a tune and get lunch done,  
And make it seem like play.  
She'd drag a table painted green  
To stand beneath a tree,  
And where the roses failed to screen  
I could not help but see.  
A skimpy sandwich cut in two  
She'd lay on thin blue plates,  
Or buttered radishes would do,  
With cheese and nuts and dates.  
She'd bring a crystal pitcher full  
Of lemonade made red  
Like the nasturtiums she'd pull  
And scatter on the bread.

I never saw such witless ways,  
Yet when her husband came,  
That brief cold lunch got only praise  
And not one word of blame.  
Her husband is a steady man  
And people think it strange  
That he will like just any plan  
Her wild mind can arrange.  
They have been married fourteen years,  
Yet when I see them kiss,  
My foolish eyes know hot salt tears  
Because of life I miss.

## RED HEELS

### A CHANT OF MY BELOVED

**M**Y beloved  
Is the altar  
Upon which is lit the incense  
Of a woman's dreams.

My beloved is darkly beautiful.  
The shadow of his profile  
Is as an effigy upon a Grecian vase,  
A curving tender smile to pierce the soul.

My beloved  
Has the quick grace of a stag in flight.  
The slim pines of the forest  
Bend not more easily to the south wind's swift caress  
Than my beloved sways in mazy rhythms of the dance.

The voice of my beloved  
Is as the music of a thousand muted lutes  
Whispering through primrose twilight.

The kiss of my beloved  
Is as warm honey on the mouth.

The eyes of my beloved  
Are as a violet flame, searingly beautiful.

## RED HEELS

The arms of my beloved  
Are as the purple hills where cedars stand  
Fragrant and indomitable through centuries.

The love of my beloved  
Is all a woman asks  
Of earth or heaven.

## RED HEELS

### AN ANSWER

WHY should I make shoddy verse,  
When Autumn prints, for all the world to read,  
Poems like these?

#### 1.

A swaggering line of sumacs  
Flaunting scarlet  
Against the dusky curve of distant hills.

#### 2.

A pearl grey twilight  
Lustrous with amethyst and sapphire  
Before a radiant dark.

#### 3.

That hushed and opal hour at the dawn  
When all the little grasses hold their breath  
To hear the silver whisper of the frost.

THE CITY CALLS

MY little garden wall is gay  
Where amber grapes are growing,  
But I must be where walls are tall,  
And crowds are going.  
I long to hear the news-boys' call—  
Wheels grinding, whistles blowing.

There is silver frost on the dahlia blooms,  
And orchid smoke on a saffron sky,  
But the black shine of a rain-wet street  
Where hurrying feet go by  
Is color enough for one who is tired  
With watching the wild birds fly.

## RED HEELS

### LONELY DUSKS

So much of beauty runs to waste  
Where careless eyes can see.  
And is there never any one  
To share a joy with me?

The warm brown wheat waits in the dusk  
For winds to turn the mill,  
And little stars slip out at night  
To dream above the hill.

Sometimes an orange chariot  
Comes up and stops awhile  
So close to earth that I can catch  
The lady moon's faint smile.

A dark bird sings a melody  
That breaks the heart to bear—  
But who is there in all the world  
To hear and know and care?

## RED HEELS

### DEFERRED

I WILL not grieve for you while autumn lingers  
Trailing her scarlet fringe across the land;  
I cannot break my heart while grapes are twining  
Through twisted branches of the ripe red haw;  
Not while the woods are full of crimson glory,  
And distant hills grow dim in smoke-blue mist;  
There is no room for loss when every sumac  
Strikes sudden radiance to heart grown drear,  
While sunsets fill the sky with fire-shot amber,  
And opal twilights fade to primrose dusk:  
I cannot grieve for you while autumn lingers,  
But, oh, the time comes . . . when I must!

## RED HEELS

### ICE-BOUND

(*for W. R. C.*)

I CAN not make you songs for winter singing:  
The dark trees lifting stark limbs  
Up to chilly skies  
Are not more barren than my heart—  
My heart that in the lush warm flush of autumn  
Gave prodigally of love and zest of living—  
But youth and joy  
Danced on across the far blue hills  
With autumn;  
Now through bleak days  
I huddle meek  
And silent.

## RED HEELS

### MOON DANCE

LAST night the shining moon came down  
And danced a dance with me,  
In a secret place where myrtle bloom  
Lies spilled beside a sea.

The thin stars sang a melody  
With a gnarled tree for a harp,  
While the wind strummed on its silver limbs  
A queer tune—shrill and sharp.

The moon and I danced in and out  
Till the tired stars were stilled,  
And a harp string broke with a brittle crash  
When the wind's last note had shrilled.

The myrtle scent lay like a pall,  
But the moon was loath to go,  
And I—I knew that at the dawn  
The little worms below

Would seek again my crumbly bones  
And feed on my shut eyes.  
So the moon and I danced while we could  
For the moon and I are wise.

## I AM TAUGHT MYSTERIES

THE top of the hill was dark and clear.  
Six little stars came out,  
And silver grasses held their breath  
To hear sky whisperings about.

For I had come to talk with the wind  
At the crystal rim of the night,  
To learn the way of hidden things  
Like wild grey geese in flight.  
To ask if honeysuckle scent  
Made the yellow moon's pale gold,  
And what the wood dove's sad note meant,  
And if scarlet clouds are cold;  
And if the song of the mockingbird  
Is caught in the mad brook's rill,  
Or whether the shimmering tune I heard  
Was an echoing daffodil;  
These were the secret things to ask  
In the night where none could see  
Dark mystery shining in my eyes  
When the wind had answered me.

But the wind was sullen that night on the hill  
Where I stood with my arms outspread,  
And I called in vain through the dark until  
My lover came instead.

## RED HEELS

For something told me who it was  
That ran with eager feet  
And held my face against his breast  
To hear his swift heart beat.

I offered him my cool young mouth:  
He drank as from a cup  
Till in the thirsty soul of him  
My own was lifted up . . .  
And all at once within me deep  
The radiant knowledge burned—  
But, oh, I cannot bear to tell  
The wisdom I have learned.

WHERE IT LISTETH

LOVE came—  
But when or how I do not know—  
A sunlit singing gladness,  
A starlit dreaming madness,  
Told me so.

Love went—  
But where or why I do not know—  
A broken weeping sadness,  
An aching lonely madness,  
Told me so.

II

I  
HAVE  
SOUGHT  
BEAUTY



FOR EVE

AND I have felt a pity surge for Eve  
Who knew alone the first delights of love.  
Sought she some silver pool and leaned above  
Its crystal mirror, dreaming? Did she leave  
A kiss within its keeping? Must she weave  
A fragile web of fancy when the moon  
Had lit its new gold lantern? Was it June  
In Eden's garden? How could she believe  
In love and lovers who had never known  
The heritage of olden lover's days?  
Who had not wept with Dido left alone  
By blue Aegean waters? felt the blaze  
Of Juliet's sweet passion?

Much she missed  
Who kept with Adam that first lover's tryst!

HELEN TO MENELAUS

BUT I am constant to you, dearest one.  
These lesser loves take not that which is yours.

(And should I bask forever in the sun  
When through the dusk a golden moon allures?)

My heart is like a harp of many strings  
That breathes a silver song to any touch  
Of tender hand, but for the master sings  
A deeper melody.

(And is that such  
A crime as needs forgiving? Can the cup  
Refuse the drink to him who pours the wine?)

Is your own brew less sweet because a sup  
Was given alien lips that drank from mine?

I weep because I cannot teach you this:  
My heart's true love is not spent with a kiss.

## RED HEELS

### WOODLAND LOVER

O YOU who must not hear the diapason  
Of my heart's deep music shall grow old  
Not knowing how my hasty feet would run  
To greet your coming, dear. Yet I shall hold  
Your loveliness in ways you do not dream,  
Since I who hunger for you so shall find  
A bit of you in every silver stream  
That cools my thirst, and where the long trails wind  
Down through the forest I shall surely see  
The shadow of your footsteps where the blue  
Spring violets have budded. Rock and tree  
And sea and sky will be a part of you,  
And I prostrate to nature's pagan god,  
Shall seek to find your lips in earthy sod.

I HAVE SOUGHT BEAUTY

I HAVE sought beauty in strange lonely places:  
A coral island in a sapphire sea,  
Whose ragged edges wove quaint shadow laces  
Where scarlet fish stared through the mesh at me;  
And in a jungle on one thundering night  
I saw black bodies leap about a blaze,  
And with their rhythm in that eerie light  
My pulse beat harmonies of ancient days;  
Once when the purple flower of twilight faded  
To leave the fragrance of some rare dim bloom  
I barely touched the wings of death, grey-shaded,  
Where I knelt weeping in a silent room.  
And seeking much has taught me I must wait,  
For beauty rests behind the death-barred gate.

TRAVEL-WORN

THE tired stars have dripped their sapphire dew  
Upon the little hills that wander home  
When night has dropped its clover-scented blue  
To soothe the heart of him who needs must roam.  
And in the still and twilit peace of now  
The thought of you comes like a whispered prayer  
Across the slow-tracked miles to show me how  
I long to feel your smooth hands in my hair,  
While you breathe benediction through my soul  
Till all the heated cares of day are gone  
To leave my spirit newly clean and whole  
And fragrant as your breast I leaned upon.  
But here the long dark night is hot and still,  
And even stars forsake this high bleak hill.

IF YOU HAD GONE

AND so I almost lost you? Oh, my dear,  
Then I had lost the dawn of all the suns  
That rise in opal beauty; not to hear  
Your voice—and all the melody that runs  
In silver singing from the throats of birds  
Would cease forever. Life would be a dull  
Harsh throb of pain with no forgetting. Words  
Would lose their meaning. When a lone white gull  
Went winging toward the sea my heart would break  
With longing for your dear remembered smile.  
Within my breast the unspent tears would ache  
Through bitter years that marked each lonely mile.  
And you, my dearest one, would never know,  
Because I had not dared to tell you so.

## F.C.P.—A PORTRAIT

THERE is a certain beauty in her face  
That holds close kindred with the quiet things  
One finds in forests, and a subtle grace  
In all her movements as of lifted wings.  
A sweet tranquillity dreams in her eyes  
That look upon the world as unafraid  
And clear as hidden pools reflecting skies.  
Her voice speaks music that the winds have played  
At midnight through the leaves, and in her smile  
Is lit the radiance of a falling star.  
When I have watched her for a little while  
I see deep in her heart that these things are:  
Patience and reverence and loyalty,  
Courage and faith and humble majesty.

## TO REMEMBER

THAT blue and emerald morning when you came  
Upon some minor errand and then stayed  
Till noon to talk with me will always claim  
A special memory, for you had made  
Me love you in the little time it took  
For you to smile a bit and carelessly  
Ask my opinion of the newest book.  
You talked of this or that and did not see  
I lost your words in dreaming of your eyes—  
Those clear brown pools of amethystine gold—  
And quite forgot I meant to be too wise  
To give a wanton lad my heart to hold.  
When other years bring mornings emerald blue.  
Again I'll love you for an hour or two!

OCTOBER

FIRST days in autumn make me catch my breath  
In sheer amaze that I shall see again  
The fruitful beauty of the earth in death  
Across the painted pageant of the plain:

A lilac dawn comes up and fades to gray,  
A thin white scarf of wild birds trails the sky,  
The sumacs fire a torch to light the day,  
And pearly rustlings of the frost drift by;

Against the curve of distant hills, the blue  
Of smoky mist falls into purple night;  
The pale gold sickle of the moon lifts new  
To hew a circled radiance of dim light.

How strange it is that autumn days will lend  
Such beauty wantonly for death to spend.

## ASSUAGEMENT

WHEN I am dead what shall this sorrow matter?  
Then they shall know and realize the truth.  
How they will noise it in their silly chatter,  
Nor stop to pity or to sigh for youth.  
But as for me. . . . I'll be beyond all caring  
In some far land where unseen beauty lies  
Forever waiting there my sad heart's sharing  
To soothe harsh pain and cool my tear-dimmed eyes.  
And as I stroll by quiet silver fountains,  
Or dreaming lie on grass in dusky shade,  
I shall forget the horror of dark mountains  
That foolish talk from little mole hills made.  
When I am dead have silver bells set ringing,  
To be a symbol of my heart's glad singing.

III

AND

I HAVE LIT  
A CANDLE  
ON MY SILL



## RECOMPENSE

I HAVE not known the sweep of far blue seas  
Where silver gulls lift wings to blown salt spray,  
And suns come crashing through the long grey curve  
Of rosy mist that marks the edge of day;  
But I have known a sea of rippled green  
Where wheatfields stretch beyond earth's limpid hem,  
And I have seen its hot waves kissed to bronze  
By winds that whispered undulant through them.

I have not seen the dawn from thin high peaks  
Where mountain fingers clutch at heaven's blue,  
And frail cloud vapors spread a chiffoned veil  
To make a cruel beauty softly true;  
But I have seen a quiet brown-fringed pool  
Where redbirds stop to drink as they flash by,  
And leaning there I've felt my heart lift up,  
For its smooth mirrored depths reflect the sky.

I have not flung afar some flaming torch  
To kindle valor in the hearts of men,  
Or blaze a way of splendor to the goal  
Where shackles loose and freedom's paths begin;  
But I have made my cottage hearthfire glow  
To warm a dreary heart grown sad and chill,  
And I have left it burning through dark nights,  
And I have lit a candle on my sill.

## RED HEELS

I have not merited the world's acclaim  
Here in my little house close by the sod,  
But I have walked through open doors to love,  
And I, on bended knees, have talked with God.

NEW CHURCHES

I THINK God loves new churches built to Him,  
And watches as each stone is laid on stone,  
And smiles to see them laid so straight and true,  
Lifting the strong wide walls to heaven's blue.  
And when the carpenters have done with them  
And each new church stands finished and alone,  
When dusk sifts violet shadows through the glass  
Of painted windows, I think that God must pass  
Between the new dim aisles and stopping where  
The last light falls across His shining hair  
He kneels and holds the first communion there.

THE THIRD CHRISTMAS

MARY at her window:

Tonight the blue star shines upon our hill  
As on the cattle shed brief years ago. . . .  
What is it strikes my heart with sudden chill?  
*I do not want to know!*

My Baby quietly sleeps in His white bed.  
How foolish is this sense of coming loss!  
So sweet He lies with little arms outspread.  
*Why should I see a cross?*

I shall look out again at His bright star.  
It minds me of the time when angels sang,  
And makes me dimly glad. *Though dark years scar,*  
*God's will must be.*

## DECLARATION

DEAR Lord:

If I had walked with you in Galilee  
My way could not have seemed so hard  
By that blue sea.

The little nagging cares of every day  
That rasp a tired mind till taut nerves fray  
Could not have mattered when your patient eyes  
So kind with tender counsel  
Bade my heart be wise.

There could have come no wraith  
Of pale grey doubt  
To cloud my faith,  
When at some misty dawn  
That found you spent  
With weary hours of praying  
I could have lent  
My cottage hearth to warm you,  
And have spread for you my table  
With its honeycomb and bread.

It would have been my joy to serve you, Lord.  
When I had cut for you sweet purple grapes  
Warm with the sun,  
Or brushed your garments free from roadside dust,  
Or knelt to loose the latchet of your shoes,  
I would have known the glory of your smile  
When I had done.  
But lacking these:

## RED HEELS

The warm touch of your hand,  
The human You that I can understand,  
And lost in futile questionings of creed  
Where bickerings take precedence of need,  
To memory of a star and one dark hill  
I cleave,  
And oh, dear Lord, I must—  
I do  
Believe!

## RIVER ELMS

I LOVE to sleep out doors beneath an elm  
Where spreads a canopy of frail green lace  
Between me and the moon—  
A fragile lace made silvery with stars.  
I lie in radiant dusk and watch the trace  
Of shadows in the circled realm  
Below the tree till the warm dark unbars  
Each secret lure of June.

Such nights bring to my heart a rich content  
And oneness with the earth, for then I know  
The feel of breathing sod,  
The deep dreams of the river rushing by  
Beneath sweet alder blooms that fall and scent  
The frothy water. *Once when a low*  
*And simple prayer went lifting toward the sky*  
*An elm tree talked with God.*

## UNORTHODOX

I DID not want to go to church that Easter morning,  
For the little house was shabby,  
And the pews were bare.  
Somehow I thought the faded carpets  
And the mottoes hung askew  
Would rasp the tender edges of my soul,  
I did so care  
For beauty on that one glad day.  
And somehow, too,  
I often feel that God  
Can best be worshipped out of doors  
In springtime,  
Where the little green things  
Push their baby leaves up through the sod,  
Or in the dim cathedral gloom  
Of some quiet wood,  
Or by the sea.  
But since my life is bound by narrow lines  
That draw me sometimes where I do not wish to be,  
I went to church.  
The minister was earnest,  
But his voice was weak,  
And his clothes lacked pressing, sadly.  
I did not hear him speak,  
For I was dreaming of vast arches,  
Candlelit,  
And vested choirs.

## RED HEELS

The people in their tawdry finery  
Did not disturb me,  
Not even when they smelled of heavy cologne,  
And babies cried,  
And silk frocks rustled down the aisle  
Importantly,  
Under hats  
With purple roses nodding on bent wires.  
And then. . . .  
Across a score of heads still bowed in prayer,  
I met your eyes,  
And there  
Within my heart, anew, was born  
The miracle and glory  
Of the Resurrection Morn.

INVITATION

**I**F you are weary come and sit beside  
A simple garden pool.  
Its quiet loveliness will soothe your heart  
While water, silver cool,  
Makes murmur through the mossy green of rocks.

Here scarlet fishes hide  
Among the limpid shadows in the deep  
Where waving grasses bide,  
While drooping willows dip their lacy fronds,  
And lotus buds unfold  
Pale creamy petals heavy with the scent  
Of summer ages old.

Sit here at peace beside this crystal spring  
And dream, and then know why  
God loves a pool so much he lets it hold  
His own blue sky!

## RED HEELS

### QUESTION

WHAT is the lovely mystery of trees  
Whose hungry roots grope blindly through dark  
sod  
So that in light, green leaves may kiss the breeze,  
Or barren wintry limbs ask alms of God?

## RED HEELS

### WHEAT FIELDS

**T**HREE is an honest dignity in wheat  
When fields of grain lie stretched beneath the sky  
Till misty green has lifted up to meet  
The distant blue where far horizons lie—  
The dignity of space and strength and toil  
Where men must work and sweating teams must tread  
Long miles in weariness to till the soil  
That hungry humankind may have its bread.  
And when the amber sheaves stand in the sun  
At autumntide, I think that every clod  
Of earth must know that harvesting is done,  
And for a fertile yield breathe thanks to God.

## RED HEELS

### BREADMAKERS

I THINK God loves the people who bake bread:  
Quiet wives in kitchens where upon the window sill  
Come hungry robins asking to be fed;  
Slim brown-skinned women who with rhythmed ease  
Turn coarse flat cakes before a smoky fire,  
Tending the ancient rites on bended knees;  
And men who work where hurried wheels are run  
All day and night to make the wholesome loaves  
Cream-white and crusty when the rows are done;  
And mothers everywhere who spend long days  
At doing simple homely tasks to keep  
The home love bright and shining down dark ways.

*“Take this and eat,”* it was that Jesus said,  
And whether hungry hearts or bodies shall be fed,  
I know that God must love the makers of the bread.

## HOUSEWIFE

THERE is a certain quiet joy  
That comes with tasks well done  
About a simple cottage home  
From dawn till setting sun.

Blue china, steaming hot from suds,  
And pies, fresh-baked, in rows,  
Crisp ruffled curtains laundered white  
That beckon when wind blows.

The kitchen floor is scrubbed and clean,  
The polished windows shine,  
And bits of blue come peeping through  
Where morning glories twine.

And everywhere the pleasant noise  
Of happy childhood's play  
To lift the heart and turn the soul  
Half consciously to pray.

And as I go from room to room  
To order each with care  
I wish that in such homeliness  
Some kindly guest could share.

Then on my stoop at eventide  
When I take time to sum  
The blessings that the day has brought  
I find that God has come.

## LINNA

THE church was heavy with the deep sweet scent of  
roses  
Banked in rows of bloom around the altar,  
Where the casket stood upon a carpet of blue gentians.  
The choir sang softly  
While tears streamed down their faces,  
For Linna was beloved by all who knew her,  
Even by those who envied her,  
And never more than now  
When she lay dead.  
Sweet Linna, now so strange and waxen pale.

The minister chose a text and then began his eulogy:  
Here lies a good woman, he said,  
And I who knew the narrow tenets of his creed  
Could only wonder.  
Poor Linna—always on hand when there was work to do  
In the church kitchen. I've seen her stand  
And wash thick plates and heavy cups and saucers  
Three long hot summer hours without stopping.  
Linna whose pagan feet had danced at dawn  
Down in the willow thicket by the brook,  
Who heard the muted laughter of gay daffodils,  
Who caught pale moonlight in a misty scarf  
That wrapped her lovely body while she lay  
Alone one midnight in the lush warm grass;

## RED HEELS

Linna who knew the secret of the prairie winds,  
And held a close communion with the singing stars.

Once when I called I found her clad  
In black georgette pajamas with crimson high-heeled  
slippers  
Clacking across the tiles to let me in;  
The air was fragrant with the pale blue incense  
Of a cigarette. She laughed a bit  
And said that I had caught her in a mood of scarlet sin.  
Sometimes she felt so bound about she simply had to fling  
A gay defiance or go quite off her balance.

And once I saw her angry when some evangelist  
Had preached a hellfire sermon that condemned  
The babies and the heathen to the pangs  
Of everlasting torment.  
I believe, she said to me,  
That God will save a good Mohammedan  
Or anyone whose life accords with his own creed  
Of what is right and wrong.  
I believe in Christ, but I believe, too, in Buddha,  
And in all saints whose people have been led to believe  
in them  
And do their works.  
Why could they, too, have not been sent  
By God to be His Sons according to the need of time and  
place?  
She dared not say these things aloud  
For there was much to be considered.  
Dear Linna, selling cakes and pies  
To help the foreign heathen.

The minister spoke with tears of her good works,  
Her willingness to be of service

## RED HEELS

In the Master's cause;  
And all the while I wondered had he known  
The lovely heart of Linna  
Would he then condemn her as an heretic.

Here lies a good woman  
Whose soul has gone to live in heaven,  
So he said,  
And I who knew her secret depths,  
Her oneness with the earth,  
Her eager heart that had gone reaching out for beauty,  
The silver shining of her clear-cut mind,  
Her bright young spirit that translated all of God  
In terms of loving,  
I echoed back  
A fervent, hushed  
Amen.

## THIS LOVELINESS I KNOW

AND I who thought the world was done  
Have found creation just begun  
Since I have touched a loveliness  
As lustrous as the mute caress  
Of gold moonlight on tranquil streams,  
And gossamer as futile dreams;  
The loveliness of wild white geese  
Against the blue where winds release  
In silver ribbons flying high  
The fleeting music of their cry;  
The beauty of cool slanted rains  
Upon the bosom of dun plains,  
And drab slopes brave with fertile yield  
Of dim new grass across each field;  
Of opal clouds that scarve the sky  
When pearl grey wisps of dusk float by,  
Of lace that spiders have spun new  
To catch a drift of tinsel dew;  
The loveliness of seas at night  
Where emerald lanes of molten light  
Are paths that wander from the shore  
To some mermaid's pink coral door;  
The loveliness that deep roots know  
Who, bedded blind that trees may grow,  
Gnaw in the dark their hungry way  
Through layered eons of dull clay;  
The beauty of a river bed

## RED HEELS

Beneath whose limpid waters spread  
The patterned waves in oozy mold  
Where lazy ripples bend and fold;  
A loveliness as big as earth  
Who gives the snow-swathed mountains birth  
And huddles them upon her breast  
Tucked in with sleepy stars to rest;  
The loveliness of life and death  
Caught up in one ecstatic breath  
When naked soul is fused with soul  
To make a single perfect whole—  
That lucent moment when a clod  
Becomes a little part of God.



IV

AGAINST  
THE SCARLET  
GLORY  
OF THE WEST



## RED HEELS

### TEXAS

#### I AM Texas.

I am the land of sunshine and of roses. Broad fields of snowy cotton stretch across my bosom, and the mournful cadence of singing darkies mingles with the melancholy note of the turtle dove and the cry of the whip-poorwill.

I am the land of loving homes where mothers kiss their young and send them to my thousands of little white school houses with full dinner pails and singing hearts.

I am the land of fertile valleys and wide grassy plains where white-faced cattle low, and the cowboy whoops in his saddle as he swings the long lariat.

I am the land of sleepy rivers and of swift rushing trains. The engineer shrieks his whistle as the long freight bends down the hill, but the tired cattle stare pensively through the box-car slats.

I am the land of derricks where the hungry drill bites into the earth day and night, and the dark green oil spurts to the sky thick and smelling; but the drillers toss their greasy caps up on the walking beam and laugh, and the toil-bent farmer dazed by his sudden wealth adds another room to his house and buys a new car.

I am the land of sleeping villages where the crowing rooster welcomes the rising sun, and the housewife gets

## RED HEELS

up early and gathers an apron full of chips to start the morning fire.

I am the land of cities where the clank of the trolley and the honk of the motor are soothing to the weary ear of the capitalist as he turns uneasily on his linen pillow.

I am the land of southern zephyrs and of mighty winds where sandstorms and the brumal blast of the norther beat their cruel way across the Panhandle.

I am the land of strawberries and perpetual summer down by the Rio Grande.

I am the land of peace and happiness and skylines.

I am the land of glowing sunsets and golden memories.

I am Texas.

## RED HEELS

### BORDER HILLS

MOSAIC of topaz, emerald, and mauve  
Lifting to heart-breaking blue,  
Across the desert they drift with the sands,  
As old as the earth. . . .  
And as new.

Out of the grey-brown dust they rise,  
Patterned in pastels and gold,  
Curving soft beauty to meet the sky,  
As young as the dawns. . . .  
And as old.

INLAND SEAS

THERE is a majesty in fields of wheat  
That slope away to meet the western sky  
Like jade-green oceans where grey sea gulls fly.  
There weaves no salty froth where tall waves beat,  
Yet in the lace of shadows drifting fleet  
Across the glaucous sheen of growing grain  
Is meshed the subtle romance of a train  
Of white-winged prairie schooners passing by.

And when the moon's pale crescent gold dips low  
Above the wheat where vagrant winds blow through,  
There comes a moment when I surely know  
The beauty of an ocean night anew.

## RED HEELS

### BOOMTOWN PICTURES

#### 1. THE RUSH

THE peaceful quiet of the smooth brown country roads is disturbed by a horde of oil-mad invaders, each eager to be first. In long lines of moving-vans they come, their heavy wheels scarring the quiet country lanes, leaving unseemly gashes and treacherous dust-filled holes in that unbroken smoothness.

Motor trucks plowing heavily through the grey dust-dirt of the road; strong muscled dray horses pulling a loaded wagon with chairs piled high on top. From a covered wagon peers a face, sunbrowned and careworn, but the eyes are eager with a half-doubtful hope.

Perched on the insecure seat of a ramshackle vehicle is an evil looking old crone chewing a snuff brush; the rags and tags of her scant household furnishings are trailing half off the broken wagon; the bony ribs of her ancient nag are heaving with struggling gasps for breath, but the old woman leans forward and beats him with a knotty stick. Her eyes are calm . . . even stolid.

Two men, one with bent shoulders and white hair, are driving a hack. It is piled with chairs and tables made from willows down by the creek, tortured into strange unnatural shapes, and made hideous with blobs of gaudy paint. At the rear a little dog runs panting, his pink tongue lolling through the dusk.

## RED HEELS

And on and on, unceasingly they come. Through the night the trucks grind past, and through the day. Nobody going in the opposite direction—facing west they come—all bound for the stinking Mecca of the oil-fields.

### 2. THE BOOSTER CLUB IS ORGANIZED

The tents pop out like marbles from a conjurer's bag.

One day the village lies somnolent beneath the blazing sun, the only sign of life one speckled hen with seven mongrel chickens.

Next day the quiet groves are filled with dirty tents, while yellow shacks of raw unpainted pine are going up on every vacant lot.

Already one industrious tent-wife's weekly wash is spread to dry, coarse woolen shirts and dingy blankets smothering the tender young buds of the bush on which they lie.

Opposite the village church a sign is being hung at the front of a hastily-constructed plank store:

Wild Cat Inn—Fried Oysters, Chile, Hamburgers—  
Open All Night.

Men stand about in groups; they look foreign and prosperous; some of them wear high-laced boots and carry bundles of blue-prints which they read as they walk along. Everywhere the talk is oil and leases.

Two hundred automobiles are parked about the little stores. The native villagers eye it all in astonished wonder.

## RED HEELS

An energetic housewife catches the spirit and advertises her rooms for rent. Before dark every cottage window bears the same label.

Under a great oak, where yesterday two children built a playhouse, a strident-voiced individual has located a gasoline stove and is selling doughnuts. A crowd gathers as he spears them deftly from the boiling grease.

The oak tree's leaves are dusty now and shrivelled.  
. . . But the town grows.

### 3. SATURDAY NIGHT

The rough plank shack is crowded with a noisy sweaty coarse humanity, hungry to spend. A mob is gathered round a platform where a black-faced clown is selling poison in brightly labelled bottles warranted to cure or money back.

From the open window of a dance hall the syncopated blare of a saxophone jazzes forth, and painted girls stand on the steps to lure the passers-by.

Three giggling school girls pause irresolutely on the corner; they want to watch the whirling figures but they are afraid to enter; a half-clad girl on the steps speaks to one and they all go inside.

A little ragged boy selling city papers; two stray dogs fighting; furtive-eyed men gazing greedily at bulging hip pockets; a gambling hall with wide open doors; smells of gasoline, garlic, crude oil, dust, crushed roadside flowers; and over it all sounds the clickety-clack clickety-clack of hammers building a rig in the graveyard.

## PIONEER: THE VIGNETTE OF AN OIL-FIELD

## I.

ALL day the wagons have gone by  
In a great cloud of dust on the highway.  
The horses plodding with down-hung heads,  
The harness clanking dully,  
Or sometimes jingling with little bells.  
The drivers sit immobile on the great iron pipes  
Like stolid images dressed in coarse cottons  
With dusty hats pulled low, shading dull unseeing eyes.  
A wheel jolts cruelly in a deep rut,  
The dust swirls in a choking fog,  
But the driver sits unmoved, staring ahead.  
All day the wagons pass in a long dust-enveloped line.

## II.

Sunset with the derricks standing stark  
Against the skyline.  
Grim sentinels, black and cruel,  
Against the golden splendor of the west.  
Row upon row they stand,  
Scarring the soft bosom of the prairie,  
Silhouettes of wealth and toil and service,  
Stark against the scarlet glory of the skyline.

## RED HEELS

### III.

At night the rough unpainted shacks are crowded  
With a pushing, jostling, coarse humanity,  
Eager to spend.

The gambling hall is brilliant with mirrored lights.  
The plank floors creak beneath the muddy-booted feet;  
An officer of the law leans against the door  
And hears the click of the dice, the whir of the wheel,  
Unheeding.

Painted women, nakedly dressed, eye every man  
From under half-closed purple-tinted lids.  
In a drug store a reeling loafer drinks raw gin  
Handed boldly across the counter.

The blare of a saxophone  
Syncopates through the open window of a dance hall.  
The people surge through the streets pushing each other,  
Hurrying from one plank shack to another,  
Eager to spend.

### IV.

In the moonlight between neglected rows of cotton  
Waits a throng with silent listening.  
The derrick, its raw newness glistening in the moonshine,  
Stands aloof and unconcerned.  
Thousands of feet beneath the cotton roots  
Sounds a faint whispering. . . .  
Something released from its dark prison  
Is making its way skyward.  
Gathering force it deepens into a grumbling roar.  
Suddenly straight to the white moon  
Shoots a mighty column of flowing gold.

## RED HEELS

It towers poised for an instant,  
Then bursts into a shower of yellow globules  
That tumble back upon the earth who sent them forth.  
It is all over in a moment,  
The derrick stands blackly dripping,  
The people laugh and clap each other on the shoulder,  
Thinking only of dollars.

### V.

It is Sunday, but the town toils on unknowing.  
The smell of crude oil hovers like a tainted pall  
Over all the rough unpainted shacks.  
The wagons lumber through the streets  
With loads of clanking pipe;  
The drill bites on unceasingly into the deep hot earth;  
The stores ply their daily trade  
With apples and with dusty purple grapes set out in front.  
From the Hotel Gladys painted girls dash out—  
Returning later some are not alone.  
There is no Sabbath quiet in all the town  
Excepting only in the weedgrown graveyard  
Where the dead lie waiting,  
And even there the evil smell of crude oil lingers.  
Oh, for a town of little homes  
With church bells quietly ringing!

## RED HEELS

### CEREMONIAL

REFINERY exhaust pipes stand in rows of twelve  
And puff white smoke against a cold blue sky,  
Like curling wreaths of incense  
To some bloated god;  
And as the rite goes on  
They bellow deep in earth  
Their pagan chant:

To work! to work! to work! to work!  
Money to make! Money to make!  
Putputput! Putputput!

Tarnish and dirt! Tarnish and dirt!  
Hearts that hurt! Hearts that hurt!  
Putputput! Putputput!

Squalor and grime! Squalor and grime!  
For beauty no time! Beauty no time!  
Money to make! Money to make!

Pollute the clean air! Don't care! Don't care!  
Quiver and quake! Shiver and shake!  
Money to make! Money to make!  
To work! To work! To work!

## THE DRAWING

ONE day of all the year the little town  
Comes to its own—on Christmas Eve.  
**F**or on that day  
The merchants give away a brand-new Ford,  
And all the farmers have been saving tickets  
With every dollar's worth that has been spent  
Through the long autumn.

That morning bright and early  
Before the silver frost has stirred awake,  
The wagons lumber down the road  
And toward the country village.  
The ruts are bumpy for the latest rain  
Was followed by a bitter freeze,  
But no one minds the jolts, for this is Christmas,  
And crops were fair,  
So there is cash to spend  
Besides the tickets—  
Who knows  
But what the mules and wagon may be left  
For Dad to bring  
While Mother and the boys drive home in that new  
flivver?  
Now and then somebody brings a load of cotton  
Piled high in snowy drift between the sideboards.  
The season's late for cotton but a man saves what he can,  
And not a boll is slighted when the price is right.

## RED HEELS

At the gin

A curl of orchid smoke climbs to a turquoise sky

Unnoted

While the loaded wagons wait their turn.

By noon the town is full of wagons

And the cars are coming in—

Cheap rusty touring cars

Spilling over with children eager to see Santa Claus,

New sedans looking sleek and prosperous,

And gaily painted roadsters filled with laughing youth

Home from college.

By two o'clock there is no parking space

Within the business district,

And the streets are crowded with eager country folk

Who come to town.

A mother and two daughters hurry in and out of stores

With happy faces;

They are buying a Christmas gift for Buddy.

A man who struck it rich in oil

Pilots his five youngsters into the Post Office.

Each sticky child has a sack of pop corn in one hand

And two bananas in the other.

They are the envy of a barefoot lad by the door.

A crippled beggar offers lead pencils hopefully,

But the man goes by without a glance.

On the corners are groups of men

Who stand talking.

Girls go by arm in arm,

Flirting with slim gawky boys in stiff collars.

Stalwart men in khaki,

And roustabouts in greasy overalls

Drift in from the oil fields.

## RED HEELS

The villagers begin to come to town in twos and threes,  
Handsome, well-dressed women a little self-conscious  
In furs and gold and silver hats.  
Everybody is asking when the drawing will take place.  
The harassed secretary of the Chamber of Commerce  
Rushes from store to store  
Gathering up belated tickets.  
Frenzied clerks hurry from counter to counter  
Trying to sell as much as possible  
Before the stores close for the drawing.  
The crowds thicken on the sidewalk  
And people are beginning to throng out in the street.  
Cars honk desperately in a hopeless effort  
To clear a passage through the crowded roadway.  
Little boys blow up red and green balloons  
Which exhaust unexpectedly with a loud unearthly  
screech.  
Somebody sets off a giant firecracker  
And a silly girl shrieks.  
The marshal comes along and orders small boys  
With packages of red Chinese torpedoes  
From the sidewalk.

Finally  
When the merchants realize  
That all the money has been spent that will be spent,  
And the tired secretary has gathered up the last ticket,  
The news begins to drift about  
That the long-hoped-for hour is at hand,  
And all the people surge at once  
Into the center of the square.

A giant wheel that holds the yellow tickets  
Is anchored to the platform of a big flat truck,

## RED HEELS

And now the marshal clears a path  
And the truck rumbles to the center of the square.  
The people surge together again  
Pushing and jostling goodnaturedly,  
And arranging their great bundles of tickets  
For instant perusal.

The secretary mounts the truck and names the judges  
Who work their way through the chattering throng  
And stand beside him on the truck.  
A little girl is chosen  
Who is handed across the shoulders of the people  
And lifted to a place beside the wheel.  
The men on the truck turn the handle  
And the great wheel moves over slowly;  
As it gathers speed the whirling mass of yellow tickets  
Is visible through the wire sides.  
Somebody perched on an awning across the street  
Yells that so and so has more tickets.  
A pasteboard box is rushed to the truck and the wheel  
Is opened  
While one of the judges pours in the belated tickets.  
The crowd sighs in relief—it may be that the lucky ticket  
Was in that last boxful.  
The wheel is turned again.  
The child is lifted up and her skinny little arm  
Dips into the wheel and comes up with a ticket.  
The great crowd holds its breath,  
In the west the sun goes down with a blaze  
Of crimson banners,  
But the crowd sees only a printed ticket  
In a small girl's hand.  
Number 808899  
Calls the secretary through a megaphone.

## RED HEELS

A great fumbling and hurried reading of tickets—  
The secretary calls the number again  
And everybody looks at his neighbor.  
Nobody has the lucky number and the ticket is destroyed,  
The great wheel turns again,  
And number 110693 is called.  
A silence broken only by the rapid shuffling of tickets.  
Here you are!  
A sunburnt farmer is hustled rapidly to the truck,  
He is trembling so that he can hardly show the judges  
His ticket.  
It is the right one.  
Calls for speech! speech!  
And the farmer is lifted to the truck;  
He bares his head and grins while the crowd applauds.  
Suddenly the air is filled with thousands  
Of yellow tickets—  
Lost hopes tossed toward a primrose sky.  
The drawing is over.

## AFTERMATH

THE boom has come and thrived and passed away.  
Now scattered through the dirty little town

Are left

Strange piles of huge unwieldy tools,  
Grown mossy red with rust,

Misshapen skeletons of blackened derricks;

The grime, the soil, the litter,

That five thousand oil-mad people

Leave

In a town built overnight.

The silent street drags through its crooked length;  
No more the echo of the mule-team's clanking chain,  
No more the vibrant throbbing of some gusher newly  
made,

Only, comes now and then,

The intermittent buzzing of one last refinery.

Plodding down the scarred road

Is a man, sweat-stained and weary.

He leads a bony, drooping mule,

And at each step

The dust puffs up with little choking plops.

He had a fortune made in leases once,

But now

His prosperous farm is left a stretch of sodden greasy  
pools

With dirty yellow stubble, wilted when the crude oil  
sprayed.

## RED HEELS

There is no shade.  
The hot sun spreads a brassy glare  
On all the harsh unlovely scene.  
The tin roofs crackle in the heat,  
And rubbish curls in loathsome ugly heaps.  
The rough unpainted shacks are empty hovels now,  
Grey with ashy dust;  
Their broken windows leer upon the streets with silent  
Hating.  
The strident voices late jarring through their walls  
Have spread the rumor of another rush  
And then have gone their eager seeking way.  
The dance hall is a heap of blackened ruins  
Where fire has held the last mad jubilee.  
The pool rooms, too, are voiceless:  
The whirring wheels have hushed their stirring,  
And fat evil-stomached spiders spin a dusty web  
Where shining mirrors hung.

These things are the last tribute that oil leaves  
With her dead.

## RED HEELS

### HYPOCRITES

OL derricks, swathed in snow  
Stand under cobalt skies,  
Marking each rod,  
Like pillars of white loveliness  
Built up to God.

So shining and immaculate  
They seem,  
One would not know  
That gaunt black ugliness lies hid  
Beneath the snow.

## THE WAGER

THE spilled moonlight was very sweet that night.  
It lay in silent yellow pools across the cotton patch  
And turned the bursting bolls to silver roses—  
Roses that shone against the sturdy black-etched leaves.  
The silver roses stretched in silver lines across the fields  
To where the woods began—  
The woods, a blurred dark mountain binding field and  
sky.

Now and then a thick magnolia petal  
Like the perfumed caress of a white-gloved hand  
Dropped gently down on my rebellious lips.  
Soft murmured rustlings in the leaves there overhead  
Told where a sleepy bird had stirred awake.  
From the blurred woods  
There came across the fields at intervals  
The poignant cry of some lone whippoorwill.  
Vignetted through the years it brought again  
A shaded porch at midnight  
Where a little girl crept through the moon-drenched vines  
To hear with lifted breath that selfsame cry.  
I saw her shiver in her skimpy cotton gown,  
And felt her childish heart come choking to her throat  
Responding to the sorrow of that mournful wail.  
How far away that little girl tonight,  
And farther too, that generous heart  
Which to a moaning bird could lend a sob.

## RED HEELS

The cotton pile on which I lay there in the shadows  
Was warm and clinging,  
But never could it rest my tired heart  
Nor brain nor soul,  
All sick with too much living,  
And a world too full of greedy self,  
And pinnacles built up on broken faiths  
And trampled aspirations.  
The wailing bird,  
The wilted leatherne petal,  
And I  
Were one there in the warm resilient cotton.

The sound of voices filtered through the fence,  
Quiet homely voices and the slithering noise of whittling  
Where a sharp jack-knife made shavings of the topmost  
rail.

You ought to uv heard Slim preach today.  
Seemed funny, sort uv, to see him there so straight and  
tall,  
And kind uv holy looking when the stained glass windows  
Made rainbows in his hair.  
But yet he seemed to belong there,  
And that big pipe organ's rollin' tone  
Was not a bit more soothin' than his voice was  
When he led in prayer.  
'Jever hear about that bet he made?  
'Twas some six years er so ago,  
Before you left the Old States to come here.  
Well, Slim had been to college one term then,  
An' some the fellers thought he put on airs.  
'Twar'n't so though; 's jest his quiet way,  
And always knowin' what to say before he said it.

## RED HEELS

He'd go right in the field and do his share,  
And would today if needed—  
A strong man's part at that.

One night at Salter's store some one spoke up  
And bragged about the fact that Samson Johns  
Had picked eight hundred pounds that day,  
And Slim, in his quiet way,  
Told how he'd averaged that the two weeks past,  
And one day totalled nine with some to spare.  
The fellers sorter gasped at that,  
Fer it's a mansized job to pick eight hundred pounds of  
cotton

In a day,

Much less to average that day in day out.  
Of course they didn't doubt Slim's word,  
For even then, before he had his call to preach,  
Slim's word was good as gold to all that knowed him.  
But they 'lowed the cotton like ez not was sandy,  
Er the scales unbalanced,  
Er maybe some mistake in addin' up.

At any rate

The word reached Johns and he was mad.  
He didn't know Slim like the rest of us.  
He'd drifted in from somewhere fer the picking season  
And thought because Slim's hands was white,  
And 'cause he used good English  
He 'uz jest some blowin' sissy,  
And he'd make him eat his words.

Next day was Sunday,  
So he saddled up and rode to Slim's house  
With quite a gang along to see the fun.  
Johns called Slim out and said,  
"I hear you're quite a cotton picker!"

## RED HEELS

Guess they must have taught you something else  
Up at that college  
Besides to wear white pants  
And play that sissy game with fancy flyswats.  
What's that you call it? Tennis?  
Well, see if you can tennis this:  
You claim to—uh picked nine hundred pounds of cotton  
in one day?  
Well I've got five hundred dollars in the bank that says  
you cain't.  
Put up er shut up."

Slim sez ez how he don't intend to gamble,  
(He'd give his promise to his ma afore she died, he  
wouldn't)  
But ez Johns seems to doubt his word, he'd pick it jest  
to show 'im.

They fixed it up before Johns left  
And set the day next Tuesday.

Of course the countryside turned out to see the picking,  
And teams wuz lined up by the fence most like a county  
fair.

Slim and Johns both had their rooters,  
Though neither side had much to say about it,  
They jest watched.

Johns set there on the fence and chawed terbacco  
An' wore a sneerin' grin till long 'bout four o'clock,  
And then he 'gin to git oneasy.

The cotton crop was fine that year—  
This here'n don't start to touch it,  
What with the drouth and weevil though it's not so bad  
at that.

Ez you know cotton picking days ain't measured by no  
clock,

## RED HEELS

An' Slim started his at sun-up.  
He kept a boy there waitin'  
To tote his sack up to the scales,  
And fast as one was filled would come another,  
While every girl fer miles around ached fer the privilege  
Uv handin' him  
The gourd of cool spring water when he'd stop to drink.  
His long white fingers went flying in and out the cotton  
bolls  
Jest like greased lightning!  
The cotton kept a pilin' on the ground  
Till looked like it would gin a bale at least.

Nobody knew just where he stood,  
Fer they had made it up  
Not to announce the weight till quittin' time.  
'Twas awful hot that day and after dinner  
The men bunched in the shade fer pitchin' dollars  
An' spinning yarns,  
But Slim, he never slacked.  
He worked right on though his blue overalls  
Was drippin' wet with sweat across the shoulders,  
And his finger nails was stubbed off to the quick.  
Slim was picking cotton fer the honor of his word  
And resting then might end in giving up.  
Slim never was no quitter . . . and ain't yet.  
When at last the sun begin to slope down in the west,  
And the long shadders went straddlin' down the rows,  
The crowd begin to gather by the scales  
And chatter sorter restless.  
Finally when every ray was gone  
And a cool twilight breeze was stirrin' in the leaves,  
Slim straightened up and bared his head and said,  
"Well boys, I guess we'll call it done,"

## RED HEELS

And quit.

I kin see yet the still blue sky  
With one great fluff of pinky cloud  
Jest like a lot uv pink whipped cream piled on a chiny  
plate,

An' Slim there with his brown hair in the breeze

An' everybody breathin' light

And hanging on to what the weigher 'ud say.

And he, the weigher, couldn't keep the pride back from  
his voice

When he had totalled up the score and said:

"My friends, our neighbor here

Has picked in ten straight hours

One thousand pounds of cotton, with forty more to  
spare!"

When we had took it in, a yell went up to heaven,

And Slim was lifted high on willing shoulders.

Johns took it like a man. He 'pologized to Slim an'  
said,

"The money's yours. It's in the bank there fer you."

And all of us was hopin' Slim would take it,

Fer the place was mortgaged,

And he was pushed to make his way in school.

But Slim just shook his head and smiled,

"My word's worth more than that," was all he said.

Well. . . . He's a Man.

An' here is somethin' I ain't never told,

An' dunno ez I orto now,

But hearin' him preach today and all

Has kept me thinking 'bout it.

That night ez I was cuttin' home across the fields

I heard Slim's voice,

And he was praying down there in the cotton patch,

## RED HEELS

A thanking God fer giving him the victory,  
And most of all the standing down temptation,  
Fer he did need that money awful bad.  
But he told God he'd leave it all with Him,  
And somehow knew that He would see him through.  
I couldn't help but lessen, for it felt like church,  
An' I took off my hat and knelt down too,  
Between the rows,  
Fer God was in the cotton patch that night  
With Slim.

The voices and the whittling moved away.

The wailing bird had hushed,  
The night grew very still,  
And little dews began to scintillate the silver roses.  
The moonlight and the honeyed air breathed benediction,  
For whether God was there or not,  
Somehow I, too, found peace  
Down in the cotton.















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